

Untitled (Self-Portrait)

Lily Manuel

I typically create works that are very self-reflective and when I visit galleries I always find myself drawn to portraits as I find these so incredibly intimate. I decided for something different, I would attempt a self-portrait using paint on canvas. I wanted to see myself in another light as such, rather than the traditional format I typically work in.

I chose the imagery that I did due to the overall effective composition. In this particular reference photograph, lighting played a high role in the saturation of colour as well as the textures present. I wanted this portrait to assert a little more dominance than I feel I actually do day to day and wanted to make sure that my gaze was directly staring straight at the audience. This work achieves this in its sheer size alone, measuring at 2 metres squared. I wanted to make sure my facial expression and body language wasn't as aggressive and a little more reserved, so that viewers understood that this is more reflective of how I am. The sense of shyness is illustrated through incorporating a realistic approach to the style of painting. I focused on simple line work and delicate blending of shades to create that softness as well as using more natural and neutral tones to keep in with that realistic feel. The background was left simple to create some balance within the piece as well as not to detract from the portrait itself and distract viewers. The murky sea water the figure is almost floating and submerged in, symbolises that notion of isolation.

After looking at the works of Australian artist Brett Whiteley, I tried to mimic his notions of composition. I experimented with Whiteley's idea also of exaggerated features, however I did this more in the sense of shadows and highlights. This created some real depth and definition especially to facial features and acted as a somewhat directory for where I wanted the viewer's gaze to travel across the image. I think the proportion and scale worked relatively well and the level of detail to make the image life-like. Colour matching became a tedious task, especially in regards to the skin tones and how these differed immensely because of the type of lighting used. This was both a positive in the overall effect of the final and negative in regards to the process.

I tried to emphasise the eyes as a focal point for this piece, as once told these are 'the windows to the soul' and eyes have a way of burning into another's soul. I think eyes especially tell someone a lot about you. In this image, I like to think the glance is strong and yet vulnerable at the same time, having moments of embodying both. I figured that viewers can interpret this portrait in whatever way they like. It represents me as an artist, one that likes to create works that are provoking in a sense of yielding a reaction of some kind. I think self-portraits enable viewers to know the artist better.

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